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United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations

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Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, by its resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998, decided to proclaim the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and invited Governments, the United Nations system, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations, to plan and implement appropriate cultural, educational and social programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations, including through organizing conferences and seminars and disseminating information and scholarly material on the subject, and to inform me of their planned activities. In that resolution, the Assembly also requested that I present a provisional report on activities in this regard to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session (see A/54/546) and a final report to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. The present report is written pursuant to paragraph 6 of Assembly resolution 54/113 of 10 December 1999. The activities described in my report A/54/546 have been pursued by my Personal Representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Giandomenico Picco, and by UNESCO.

2. That the General Assembly's call for a dialogue among civilizations seems to have been well received across the world, in both the public and the private sectors led to the launch of a number of initiatives aimed at celebrating, and diffusing the fear of, diversity, and underscoring the importance of inclusion.

3. Over the last 12 months, governmental and academic institutions and non-governmental organizations have conducted seminars, debates and research work on the issue of the dialogue among civilizations, bringing together a variety of civil society groups. The topic of dialogue among civilizations was also the subject of a meeting, at the head-of-State level, that took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 5 September 2000. The meeting was strongly supported by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, and chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO. The Secretary-General, 12 heads of State (of Afghanistan, Algeria, Georgia, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Latvia, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Qatar and the Sudan), the Secretary of State of the United States of America and the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Costa Rica, Egypt, India and Iraq were among those in attendance (see annex I).

* The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

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II. The conceptual underpinnings

4. As mentioned in the 1999 report, diversity is the concept underlying a focused reflection about dialogue among civilizations. Learning how to address diversity has become a more compelling necessity as our world has grown smaller and our interaction more intense and, indeed, unavoidable. It is the perception of diversity as a threat that is at the very origin of war. It is the perception of diversity as a threat that blinds so many, who equate it with enmity. It is the perception of diversity as a threat that has made so many overlook the common humanity that unites us all. Can a reflection on these issues help in the rediscovery of the foundations of the United Nations? Can it be directed towards enriching the vision that emanates from the United Nations? Can it become concrete and practical?

5. I am very grateful that a number of eminent persons (Prince Hassan bin Talal, Richard von Weizacker, Jacques Delors, Dr. A. Kamal Aboulmagd, Dr. Hannan Ashrawi, Dr. Lourdes Arispe, Dr. Ruth Cardoso, Dr. Leslie Gelb, Dr. Nadine Gordimer, Professor Sergey Kapitza, Dr. Hayao Kaway, Ambassador Tommy Koh, Dr. Hans Kung, Professor Amartya Sen, Professor Tu Wei-Ming and Professor Javad Zarif) have kindly accepted the invitation to cooperate with my Personal Representative in pursuing these reflections during the next year. Their work will be contained in a book to be presented to me by late summer 2001. In striving towards those objectives, the conceptual journey may be articulated along the following lines:

The indignities of the 1990s:

- A sober look at ethnic cleansing, killings in the name of God and similar atrocities stemming from the perception of diversity as a threat;

Diversity and the United Nations:

- Diversity as an inherent part of universality, which is an integral feature of the philosophy behind the world organization;
- Diversity and the common denominator of values, as embodied in the Charter of the United Nations and other United Nations documents;

Diversity as the human face of globalization:

- In today's world, interdependence is a two-way street as never before. It is no longer only the case that the major powers affect the smaller ones, but also the reverse. "Our world has never been more integrated, more vulnerable and more unequal";

Dialogue as a seed for a new paradigm of international relations:

- Revisiting the concept of the enemy. Do we need an enemy?;
- Can we aspire to a society in which we leaders lead without an enemy?;
- If, at this stage in human development, society cannot exist without an enemy, can we all aim to rally against the same enemy — intolerance?;
- Rigid alliances may be remnants of the past. Are alignments to be flexible according to issues?;
- Individual responsibility as an indispensable ingredient of a new paradigm;
- Accountability of the individual in international relations.

III. The unsung heroes of dialogue

6. Examples are the best means for conveying a message in a convincing manner. The faces, names and stories of 12 individuals from a spectrum of societies, who have reached across the "divide" to the "other", will be shown in short television spots. The 12 spots — of 30 seconds each — will be offered to all television stations in the world for broadcasting as many times as possible during the year 2001. The same spots will also be placed on the web site for the dialogue, which is being established by the United Nations Secretariat. It will be an interactive site through which it is expected that direct and instant communication may be established.

IV. From theory to practice

7. If, indeed, it is possible to define a new paradigm of international relations engendered by the dialogue, then it should be possible to transform the theory into

practice. In the spirit of the dialogue, it has already been possible to achieve small steps in the communication between two Member States that had, thus far, been at odds with each other. On the occasion of the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, arrangements were made by the Secretary-General to engender in the future real dialogue; in this case, at least listening to each other — on the part of the leaders of these two countries — had been possible. Thus, it should also be possible to put forth a proposal that focuses on a specific area of the world and suggests a specific diplomatic initiative by the Secretary-General. This would be a fitting conclusion to the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

8. A United Nations Trust Fund for the dialogue among civilizations was established late in 1999. Switzerland has contributed in cash, while others have offered to defray some of the costs incurred by the meetings of the Eminent Persons Group. Academic institutions and non-governmental organizations have also offered support and assistance. Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy and International Relations is providing the secretariat for the work of the Eminent Persons Group. As the contributions have been limited, support for some of the activities has also come from the private sector. No funds from the regular budget have been allocated to activities related to the dialogue among civilizations.

Annex

Attendance at the Round Table on Dialogue among Civilizations organized at United Nations Headquarters on 5 September 2000

Heads of State

Afghanistan	Mr. Burhanuddin Rabanni
Algeria	Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika
Georgia	Mr. Edouard A. Shevardnadze
Indonesia	Mr. Abdurrahman Wahid
Islamic Republic of Iran	Mr. Mohammad Khatami
Latvia	Ms. Varna Vike-Freiborg
Mali	Mr. Alpha Omar Konar
Mozambique	Mr. Joachim Alberto Chissano
Namibia	Mr. Sam Nujoma
Nigeria	Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo
Qatar	Sheikh Hamad bin Kahlifa
Sudan	Mr. Omer Hassan El Bashir

Foreign ministers

Azerbaijan	Mr. Vilayat Guliyev
Costa Rica	Mr. Roberto Rojas Lopez
Egypt	Mr. Amre Moussa
India	Mr. Jaswant Singh
Iraq	Mr. Tarik Aziz
United States of America	Ms. Madeleine K. Albright

Intellectuals

China	Mr. Ru Xin
France	Mr. Edgar Morin
Islamic Republic of Iran	Mr. Mohammed Javad Faridzadeh
Jamaica	Mr. Rex Nettleford
Japan	Mr. Masanori Aoyagi
Lithuania	Ms. Ugnė Karvelis
Netherlands	Mr. Hans van Ginkel
Nigeria	Mr. Wole Soyinka
Pakistan	Ms. Attiya Inayatullah
Peru	Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar
Republic of Korea	Mr. Byong-Ik Koh
Russian Federation	Mr. Alexandre Yakovlev
United States of America	Mr. Richard Bulliet
United States of America	Ms. Jane Cortez Edwards
United States of America	Mr. R. K. Ramazani
United States of America	Ms. Flora Lewis